

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

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AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 0369

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MA

SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION IN MADAGASCAR: THREE WEEKS LATER

REF: TANANARIVE 0351

BEGIN SUMMARY: DESPITE PASSAGE OF THREE WEEKS SINCE ASSASSINATION OF COL RATSIMANDRAVA, GOMR IS CONTINUING TO ENFORCE TIGHT CONTROLS ON MOVEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS THROUGHOUT ISLAND. GENERAL SENSE OF UNCERTAINTY PREVAILS AMONG MALAGASY, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE UNABLE TO IDENTIFY SPECIFIC THREAT WHEN ASKED. SITUATION CONTINUES TO IMPOSE OPERATIONAL DIFFICULTIES ON EMBASSY, NASA, AND AMERICAN COMMUNITY. EARLY RETURN TO NORMALCY UNLIKELY, AT LEAST FOR TANANARIVE AREA. END SUMMARY.

1. THREE WEEKS HAVE PASSED SINCE ASSASSINATION OF FORMER CHIEF OF STATE COL RICHARD RATSIMANDRAVA FEB 11 AND SUBSEQUENT FIGHTING BETWEEN ARMED FORCES AND REBELLIOUS POLICE UNIT, WHICH RESULTED IN COMPLETE SUPPRESSION OF LATTER, BUT ATMOSPHERE IN MADAGASCAR HAS FAR FROM RETURNED TO NORMAL. EXTREMELY TIGHT GOVERNMENT CONTROLS REMAIN IN EFFECT ON ALL MOVEMENT AND

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COMMUNICATION THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, EXEMPLIFIED BY DUSK-

TO-DAWN CURFEW IN TANANARIVE, STRICTLY ENFORCED. ALL INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC AIRLINE FLIGHTS REMAIN SUSPENDED, APART FROM BIWEEKLY "SPECIAL FLIGHTS" OF AIR MADAGASCAR TO PARIS, AN OCCASIONAL "SPECIAL FLIGHT" TO REUNION, AND A FEW IRREGULAR FLIGHTS WITHIN COUNTRY. A NUMBER OF FOREIGN TOURISTS HAVE BEEN STRANDED HERE FOR WEEKS NOW; SOME STILL ARE IN OUTLYING PARTS OF MADAGASCAR, WHILE A NUMBER OF BUSINESSMEN, DIPLOMATS, NASA PERSONNEL AND OTHERS CAUGHT OUT OF THE COUNTRY HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO RETURN. DURING PAST WEEK SCHOOLS WERE ALLOWED TO REOPEN, BUT MILITARY GOVERNOR OF TANANARIVE TODAY WARNED STUDENTS NOT TO CONGREGATE AROUND SCHOOLS BUT TO GO IMMEDIATELY TO CLASSES, AND ON LEAVING, GO IMMEDIATELY HOME. UNDER PROVISIONS OF MARTIAL LAW, SPORTS EVENTS, MOVIES, AND ALL OTHER GATHERINGS OF MORE THAN TEN PERSONS REMAIN BANNED.

2. AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP AND CONTROL OF COMMUNICATIONS EXTENDS EVEN TO DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS. EMBASSIES STILL NOT PERMITTED TO SEND ENCRYPTED CABLES, BUT ALLOWED ONLY CLEAR-TEXT MESSAGES IN FRENCH. ALL TELEPHONE CALLS MUST BE IN FRENCH OR MALAGASY AND ARE MONITORED. ONE WORD IN ENGLISH ON PHONE OFTEN LEADS TO DISCONNECTION ON LONG DISTANCE CALLS. BUSINESSMEN ATTEMPTING TO SEND CABLES TO FOREIGN SUPPLIERS HAVE HAD THEM REFUSED BECAUSE OF INCLUSION OF ONE OR TWO WORDS IN ENGLISH, WHILE COMMERCIAL MESSAGES CONTAINING NUMBERED ORDERS FOR SPARE PARTS HAVE BEEN REFUSED DUE TO SUSPICION OF POSSIBLE CODING.

3. AMONG OTHER MEASURES OF CONTROL, "COMMITTEES OF PUBLIC SAFETY" HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED IN SEVERAL PROVINCIAL CENTERS TO REPORT ON ANY SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY AND ARE REPORTEDLY TO BE FORMED IN NEIGHBORHOODS OF TANANARIVE. REGIONAL MILITARY GOVERNORS HAVE SEVERELY ENFORCED NEW PRICE CONTROLS, OFTEN INVOLVING ROLLBACKS ON PRICES OF BASIC COMMODITIES. PRESS, NOW SUBJECT TO DIRECT GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND CENSORSHIP, CONTAINS DAILY REPORTS OF STORES CLOSED OR MERCHANTS IMPRISONED BY ORDER OF MILITARY GOVERNORS FOR ALLEGED VIOLATION OF PRICE CONTROLS OR "FAILURE TO SELL MERCHANDISE" AT FIXED PRICES. INDIAN AND CHINESE MERCHANTS HAVE BEEN MOST COMMON TARGETS FOR RECENT

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PUNITIVE MEASURES AND HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED BY ETHNIC GROUP IN LOCAL PRESS.

4. SINCE SMOOTH TAKEOVER OF POWER BY MILITARY DIRECTORY FEB 12 AND SUPPRESSION OF GROUPE MOBILE DE LA POLICE UNIT OVER NEXT FEW DAYS, NO PUBLIC ORDER DISTURBANCES OF ANY SORT HAVE OCCURRED IN MADAGASCAR, TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, AND THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN OUTWARDLY COMPLETELY CALM AND QUIET.

NONETHELESS, ATMOSPHERE AMONG MOST MALAGASY IS OF WIDESPREAD UNCERTAINTY AND SUSPICION. MOST COMMONLY HEARD COMMENT IS TO THE EFFECT THAT "THE EVENTS OF FEBRUARY ARE NOT YET OVER" AND "MORE WILL HAPPEN." AT SAME TIME, NO ONE SEEMS ABLE TO PINPOINT SPECIFIC THREAT TO AUTHORITY OF THE MILITARY DIRECTORY, OR SOURCE OF SPECULATED FUTURE TROUBLE. CONCERNING ASSASSINATION OF COL RATSIMANDRAVA, SPECULATION CONTINUES AS REPORTED REFTEL.

5. UNCERTAINTY OF SITUATION HAS GENERATED CONCERN AMONG NON-OFFICIAL AMERICAN COMMUNITY WHICH HAS LED TO NUMEROUS INQUIRIES DIRECTED AT EMBASSY PLUS FREQUENT REQUESTS FOR EMBASSY ASSISTANCE WITH GOMR PRIMARILY CONCERNING U.S. CITIZEN TRAVEL, COMMUNICATIONS, AND THEFT PROBLEMS. GIVEN ABSENCE OF REGULAR EMBASSY AND NASA COMMUNICATIONS, EMBASSY IS ASSISTING TO BEST OF ITS ABILITY. CONSULAR OFFICER STILL STRANDED IN NAIROBI AS IS NOW ALSO NEW MARINE GUARD. PROBLEM OF INCREASING CONCERN TO NASA IS BACKLOG OF SHIPMENTS IN TAMATAVE, SOME DATING BACK TO SEPTEMBER 10, 1974, WHICH CONTAIN EQUIPMENT THAT MUST BE INSTALLED AND OPERATING BY 15 MAY. (EMBASSY IS RAISING NASA PROBLEM WITH MOFA.) USIS RESUMED ENGLISH CLASSES WHEN SCHOOLS REOPENED MAR 3 BUT REST OF CULTURAL CENTER REMAINS CLOSED TO CONFORM WITH GOMR REGULATIONS. UNCLASSIFIED DIPLOMATIC POUCHES NOW MOVING NORMALLY ALTHOUGH EMBASSY TWICE SENT EMBOFF'S TO AIRPORT TO INSURE THEIR DESPATCH. DESPITE EMBASSY REPRESENTATIONS AND PERSISTENT QUESTIONS DIRECTED TO GOMR DATE OF RESTORATION OF FLIGHTS TO NAIROBI, PRETORIA, AND OTHER NEARBY POSTS REMAINS UNCERTAIN. CONSEQUENTLY, SEVERAL POUCHES, INCLUDING THOSE CONTAINING PLAGUE VACCINE AND ALL CLASSIFIED ONES REMAIN STRANDED.

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6. IN SUM, DESPITE CALM WHICH HAS PREVAILED IN RECENT WEEKS AND ABSENCE OF ANY EVIDENT THREAT TO PUBLIC ORDER OR THE MILITARY DIRECTORY, NORMAL MALAGASY INSULARITY, SUSPICION OF FOREIGNERS, AND APPREHENSION OF TRIBAL CONFLICT (MERINA VS. COTIER) HAVE ALL BEEN INTENSIFIED BY EVENTS OF FEBRUARY, IN TANANARIVE AT LEAST. COUNTRY CONTINUES TO LIVE IN ATMOSPHERE OF CRISIS WHICH BEGAN WITH DISSOLUTION OF RAMANANTSOA CABINET JANUARY 25. IT IS DIFFICULT TO FORETELL HOW LONG THESE CONDITIONS WILL LAST, BUT WE DO NOT EXPECT SEVERE GOVERNMENT CONTROLS ON MOVEMENT AND PRIVATE COMMUNICATIONS TO BE LIFTED IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. CONDITIONS FOR FOREIGNERS AND BUSINESSMEN HERE WILL BE DIFFICULT. MOST OF THE GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY HAS RETURNED TO SOMETHING APPROACHING BUSINESS AS USUAL, BUT PRIVATE BUSINESS IS SUFFERING INCREASINGLY FROM TIGHT

CONTROLS ON TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATIONS, THE MILITARY-
ENFORCED PRICE CRACKDOWNS ON MERCHANTS, NEW CONTROLS WHICH
HAVE SLOWED SHIPPING AND TRANSPORTATION OF GOODS,
AND INCREASED SUSPICION OF FOREIGNERS IN GENERAL. IN ALL,
IT SEEMS UNLIKELY CONDITIONS WILL RETURN TO WHAT THEY WERE
BEFORE THE RATSIMANDRAVA ASSASSINATION FOR SOME TIME TO
COME.

MENDENHALL

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